

VZCZCXRO5931
PP RUEHLA
DE RUEHMD #0483/01 0740834
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
P 150834Z MAR 07
FM AMEMBASSY MADRID
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 2088
INFO RHMFISS/CDR USEUCOM VAIHINGEN GE PRIORITY
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHDC PRIORITY
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC PRIORITY
RUEHLA/AMCONSUL BARCELONA 2526

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 MADRID 000483

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 03/14/2017
TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [MARR](#) [SP](#)
SUBJECT: OUTGOING SPANISH DEP DEFMIN ON AFGHANISTAN, BILAT
RELATIONS, DOMESTIC POLITICS

Classified By: DCM Hugo Llorens for reasons 1.4 (b) & (d).

¶1. (C) SUMMARY. In a farewell meeting, outgoing Deputy Defense Minister Francisco Pardo told DCM on March 13 that his recent trip to the US was useful. He said that he continues to worry about how to manage the "asymmetry" in the bilateral defense relationship. Pardo reiterated the Zapatero government's long-term commitment to Afghanistan while noting the domestic political complexities of the deployment. Pardo said that he is returning to his home region of Castilla-La Mancha to be the right-hand man of the regional president. NOTE: On March 14, local press reported that current MOD undersecretary for training and personnel Soledad Lopez will move up into the deputy minister job. MOD has made no formal announcement yet. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (C) DCM met with Pardo to thank him for playing a key role in the strong bilateral defense relationship during his three years as deputy defense minister. Pardo claimed to be surprised to be leaving MOD, saying that he had received a call from Castilla-La Mancha regional president Barreda three weeks ago (during Pardo's trip to the US) asking Pardo to come back to his home region to run as #1 on the Socialist Party list. Pardo, who built his career in the Castilla-La Mancha government before coming to MOD with then-Defense Minister Bono, said that Barreda went to President Zapatero to request that Pardo be allowed to leave MOD in order to serve the party.

¶3. (C) On Afghanistan, Pardo said that the Zapatero government has made a robust, long-term commitment of troops and financial aid and won't pull out. He noted that Spanish troops are currently reinforcing the southern border of their RC-West area of responsibility, supporting the NATO's Operation Achilles offensive against the Taliban in Helmand province. Pardo said that he appreciates the USG's understanding that it is not helpful to publicly hammer Spain for its inability to send additional troops now because of the current electoral climate. He said that there is no particular groundswell either for or against Spanish participation in Afghanistan, but that the Socialists' far-left partners in Parliament are so adamantly opposed to Spanish involvement in NATO-ISAF that the government has little maneuvering room. The DCM suggested that the GOS could do more to publicly sell the mission. Pardo agreed, noting the impressive amount of progress that the Afghan people have experienced in the past few years in education, nutrition, democratic freedom, etc.

¶4. (C) Pardo said that his late-February meetings with Deputy Defense Secretary England and others in the Pentagon and US defense industry were useful. He said that he has been proud to support a strong bilateral relationship, but that he continues to worry about the perception of asymmetry in the relationship. Pardo said that Spaniards see the US using

Spanish bases and making billions in defense sales to Spain, while Spain gets nothing directly in return. He acknowledged that the Spanish military generally prefers US military equipment because it is technologically better, but said that the US should consider giving Spanish politicians something in return to help them stand up to European neighbors who want Spain to buy European. Pardo specifically referred to the Joint Strike Fighter, in which he said he had fought hard to get Spain in the program, but on which Spain will take a lot of pressure from France.

15. (C) COMMENT. People in defense circles were surprised that Defense Minister Alonso left Pardo in the #2 job when Alonso took over MOD nearly a year ago. Pardo was so strongly associated with Alonso's predecessor Jose Bono that many expected him to leave right away. Pardo's departure now, coupled with the recent replacement of MOD policy director Torrente, a career admiral, with a relatively young diplomat, indicate that Alonso feels comfortable taking the reins of MOD himself after benefiting during the past year from the counsel of the Bono holdovers.

16. (U) BIO NOTE. Apparent incoming Deputy Defense Minister (officially "Secretary of State for Defense") Soledad Lopez has served as MOD Undersecretary for a year, following Minister Alonso to MOD from Ministry of Interior. As Undersecretary, Lopez has been responsible for personnel, training, and recruitment. As she recently told DCM, a major focus has been negotiating the proposed Military Career Law, which among other things would allow Spanish cadets to earn bachelor's degrees while studying at the Spanish military academies.

17. (U) BIO NOTE (con't). Forty-eight years old, Lopez trained

MADRID 00000483 002 OF 002

as a lawyer and began her career as a labor inspector. She rose through the ranks at the Ministry of Labor and in 1994-95 served as the chief of staff to the Minister of Social Affairs. In 1996-97, Lopez served as Labor Attache in the Spanish embassy in Mexico, a post from which she also covered Cuba. She lost that position when the government changed hands. When Alonso became Interior Minister in 2004, he appointed her Undersecretary of Interior, a position in which Lopez had the same budget responsibility at Interior that she would now have at MOD.

Llorens